



# AIRMEN WARRIORS

## BASIC MILITARY TRAINING EVOLVES TO MEET WARFIGHTING DEMANDS

by Annette Crawford • photos by Tech. Sgt. Cecilio M. Ricardo Jr.

**T**he “pickle” suits are gone. So are the two-story wooden structures, except for a few token buildings sprinkled across the base. Women trainees no longer take make-up and cosmetics classes. The “Green Monster” exists no more. The banks of pay phones have disappeared, and you no longer hear calls of “Smoke ‘em if you got ‘em!” Yes, Air Force basic military training has changed.

Nearing 7 million graduates since basic training began, the Air Force is on the threshold of major changes in its program as the service reaches its 60th anniversary. The most significant transformation is extending the length of BMT by two and a half weeks. And that evolution is one of necessity – a necessity to enhance warfighting skills, says Col. Robert J. MacDonald, commander of the 737th Training Group at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio.

**A trainee from the 332nd Training Squadron uses the butt of his rifle to attack a simulated aggressor with minimum force during the field training exercise portion of basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. Today's Airmen face a new and improved basic military training program — that means the opportunity to enhance warfighting skills.**

“From 9/11 we learned that in order for us to do our jobs, we need to go to other locations,” the colonel said. “We have to be able to go to places that aren’t well established, so the expansion of BMT and the changes involved with that are positive things.”

With approximately 5,000 Airmen in the area of responsibility performing duties and missions that the Army has traditionally done, enhanced training was required.

“These things require a different skill set, an air base defense skill set. Training in both the M-9 and M-16 — those things are more and more important,” Colonel MacDonald said.

**Winds of change**

Based on world events and mission requirements, the length of the BMT program has bounced everywhere from two days to 13 weeks. The first 20 years of its existence saw the most flux.

During the Korean War buildup in 1950, BMT dropped from four to two weeks. Very little training was going on except for processing and uniform issue. The entire mathematics portion was deleted. Then in January and February 1951, the two-week program was reduced to processing alone — a matter of days. Airmen had to make up their training at follow-on locations. By March of that year, it shot back up to eight weeks. BMT has been at the six-week mark since 1966.

And as the length of BMT fluxed, so did the nature of the world. For many of the Airmen who joined after Vietnam and before Desert Storm, deployments were unheard of unless they were in an operational career field. Typical desk-bound jobs were rarely found in a forward operating location — that was something for “the folks in flight suits.”

But since Desert Storm, and especially since 9/11, that culture has changed. The Airmen who sign up today understand that they will deploy, and that they will more than likely learn about jobs that were previously considered responsibilities of the Army.

To accommodate these demands, the new eight and a half week-program will include a fully functioning field training area. The change is expected to take effect in fiscal 2008.

With the additional training time, Airmen will have the opportunity to go beyond just being familiar with skills. They will become proficient in weapons handling and maintenance, integrated base defense and emergency medicine. Other areas, such as classes on



Air Force history and heritage, will be enhanced. New training will be introduced on suicide prevention and sexual assault prevention and reporting.

Leading the Airmen through these changes will be the NCOs who have led trainees for 60 years — the military training instructors.

**Backbone of the program**

The core strength of the basic military training program will always be the military training instructors.

“Our military training instructors aggressively teach Air Force tradition, heritage and indoctrination,” Colonel MacDonald said, “so Airmen (graduate) with the level of discipline to understand what their duty is, and to do their duty, regardless of what the conditions are.”

One of those lynchpin NCOs is Tech. Sgt. Terry Thoe, a MTI since 2001. The Humble, Texas, native has been on 13 deployments and served in eight combat zones since joining in 1989.



**During the second day of training, Military Training Instructor Tech. Sgt. Terry Thoe (above) teaches facing movements** to the members of Flight 572, 332nd Training Squadron. Master Sgt. Lisa Moberly (left) instructs a trainee how to properly address “the snake pit,” a collection of military training instructors, in the dining facility during lunch. MTIs are tough, but that’s their job. They have the challenge of converting young civilians into Airmen capable of living the core values and performing in the operational Air Force – all in a matter of weeks.



**Ready for the challenge, Trainees Jenni Hawkins and Jenifer Calhoun (above) scream “Warriors!” before entering the confidence course** during basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. Trainee Teresa Martinez (above, right) carefully navigates a water obstacle at the confidence course. Trainees march back to camp after a long day of defending defensive fighting positions and practicing self aid and buddy care techniques in the field training exercise portion of Warrior Week.

He feels the stress factors are the same as when he went through basic training, but physical readiness training has improved greatly.

“We did PC — physical conditioning — in our BDUs and tennis shoes. It was nothing like what we have now,” he said.

Sergeant Thoe watches over his flights with an observant eye for detail.

“I watch every move they make,” he said. “I know everything they’re thinking when they’re thinking it.”

And when those thoughts are less than Air Force-like, Sergeant Thoe is there to rein Airmen in.

“They took an oath to obey the orders of those appointed over them, and it doesn’t matter if that person is the same rank or not,” he said. “When they get out of line I remind them of the UCMJ and the core values.”



His techniques must be working. When asked who among his flight wanted to be military training instructors, three trainees shot up their hands without hesitation.

#### Out of the mouths of trainees

Though not all trainees are ready to sign up for MTI duty, almost all can recognize the amazing changes they’re experiencing. They’re transitioning from trainees to warrior Airmen.

The women of Flight 572, 322nd Training Squadron, graduated Aug. 11. A week before their graduation, they gathered in the dormitory dayroom to talk about their experiences in basic military training.

Airman Erika Jenkins of Columbia, S.C., attended the University of North Carolina at Greensboro for one year before enlisting.

“I joined the Air Force because it seemed as though my father had planned out my life for me. After attending college for one year I realized that it wasn’t something I really wanted to do,” she said. “I wanted to set myself apart from my peers.”

About half of the 45-member flight enlisted immediately after high school. Several had college under their belt, and a number were from military families.

“Dad was in the Marines,” said Airman Desiree Campbell of Crystal River, Fla. “He’s the reason I joined the Air Force — he suggested it. He said if he could have gone back to do it again he would join the Air Force instead. My dad’s my hero and I want to make him proud.”

On her graduation day July 14, Airman Betsy Ann Pittman couldn’t stop smiling. Her favorite portion of training?

Warrior Week, a concept that became reality in October 1999. Scheduled during the fourth week of training, Warrior Week includes the confidence course, weapons training and initial training in military survival skills — all basic skills needed to be a successful member of the air and space expeditionary forces.

“That’s where you really take all your training and all the hardcore stuff about being an Airman,” the Winlock, Wash., native said. “That’s when you got to yell and you got to scream and you got to roll around in the mud and hold that gun and actually fire a gun.”

Twenty-five-year-old Airman Alan Kenoyer graduated from basic training in January. Now stationed at the 343rd Training Squadron at Lackland, he said he was amazed with what his military training instructor accomplished.

“I don’t know how my TI did what he did. Fifty just ... ignorant males. All in the same dormitory. And he was there from 4 a.m. to midnight. I have to give that man kudos. Staff Sgt. Leslie Green really influenced my life to no end,” said the Vancouver, Wash., native and basic training honor graduate. “If one man can affect one individual in each flight that he has, then more power to him because those are the kind of individuals the Air Force needs.”

Airman Kenoyer was 25 when he got to basic training, and had smoked for 11 years. His initial run time was 12:40, and he could knock out only 20 push-ups and 15 sit-ups.

“By the time I (graduated), my final run time was 9:43, and I could do 62 push-ups and 57 sit-ups,” he said. “The Air Force has instilled in me the hope that I can be constantly improving myself. It has been the best experience of my life, hands down.”



**Trainee Ashley Williams (above, left) sheds a tear during the Airman’s coin ceremony at Lackland.** Trainees in their sixth week of basic military training receive an Airman’s coin marking their transition from trainee to Airman. Airman Basics Shortner and Erika Jenkins hug after graduating from basic military training in August.

#### Taking the high road

As the program continues to evolve, one thing won’t change — prospective Airmen can expect the biggest challenge of their lives when they come to basic training.

“Thucydides, in writing ‘The History of the Peloponnesian War’ about the warriors from Athens and Sparta, said, ‘He who is best is trained in the severest of schools.’ The Airmen who show up here will be trained in one of the severest of schools because we want a high-quality Airman to walk out the other end,” the colonel said.

And for Sergeant Thoe, he knows that his flights will succeed.

“When they go out there, they’re going to represent me,” the military training instructor said. “I always tell them, ‘Let your actions speak for themselves. Take the high road.’” 🦅